



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge Sweetwater Marsh & South San Diego Bay Units

*Planning Update 9, October 2006*

### Final CCP Approved!

The initial planning process for the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Sweetwater Marsh and South San Diego Bay Units) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is now complete. The Record of Decision has been signed and implementation of the CCP can begin. There is however still much to accomplish before the vision for the Refuge can be achieved. Funding must be identified to conduct and then implement detailed planning for the plan's habitat enhancement and restoration proposals. Other funding must be secured to implement the various public use proposals included in the approved CCP. Accomplishing the proposals included in the CCP will take time, money, and continued input from you. We look forward to your continued participation as we move forward to implement the Final CCP for this Refuge.

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### *Message from the Refuge Manager*

I am pleased to announce that the Record of Decision (ROD) for the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was signed by Steve Thompson, Manager for the California and Nevada Operations Office, on September 29, 2006. The ROD is the decision made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for how the San Diego Bay NWR will be managed over the next 15 years. The signing of the ROD signifies the approval of the CCP and adoption of Alternative C (Implement Habitat Enhancement and Restoration and Improve Existing Public Uses) for the Sweetwater Marsh Unit and Alternative D (Expand Habitat Management, Enhance Nesting Opportunities, Maximize Habitat Restoration, and Provide Additional Public Use Opportunities) for the South San Diego Bay Unit. The ROD also verifies that the Final CCP/EIS has adequately addressed the issues identified during the public process, and that the goals, objectives, and strategies proposed under the selected alternatives are consistent with Service policies, Refuge purposes, and sound wildlife and habitat management practices.

We very much appreciate the time that many of you have taken to provide comments and recommendations throughout the CCP process. The involvement of dedicated individuals and various organizations and public agencies was essential to the development and completion of the CCP.

Your input will again be needed as we move forward with our step-down restoration and public use planning.

To keep you apprised of these planning efforts, updates will be included in our Refuge newsletter, "Notes from the Refuge," and on the Refuge Complex website. For greater involvement in Refuge programs, you might also want to consider becoming a member of the Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuges. More information about keeping in touch is provided on page 3.

Once again, I thank you for your participation in the CCP process. With your assistance, we have completed the first step towards realizing the Service's vision of conserving the coastal wetlands and uplands in and around south San Diego Bay; protecting the listed species and other fish, wildlife, and plants supported by these habitats; and providing compatible public uses that will enable the public to enjoy and appreciate the importance of protecting these resources for future generations.

Don Brubaker  
Manager, San Diego Coastal Refuges



Belding's Savannah Sparrow  
by K. Morris

## **Selection of Alternative C for the Sweetwater Marsh Unit and Alternative D for the South San Diego Bay Unit**

The Service will implement Alternative C (Implement Habitat Enhancement and Restoration and Improve Existing Public Uses) for the Sweetwater Marsh Unit and Alternative D (Expand Habitat Management, Enhance Nesting Opportunities, Maximize Habitat Restoration, and Provide Additional Public Use Opportunities) for the South San Diego Bay Unit, as described in the Final CCP/EIS. These alternatives best achieve the Refuge purposes and contribute toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife science, conservation, legal mandates, and Service policies.

The selected alternatives recognize the need to provide high quality habitat for the Refuge's Federally listed species, while also maintaining and enhancing the habitats needed to support the overall biological diversity of the Refuge. The selected alternatives also include expanded opportunities for compatible public use including wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation; provisions to protect cultural resources; recommendations for addressing existing contaminant issues; and proposals for establishing partnerships to address issues such as water quality, the accumulation of discarded fishing line around the bay, and stewardship of Refuge resources.

### **Key Habitat and Wildlife Management Components of the Selected Alternatives**

#### Alternative C – Sweetwater Marsh Unit

##### Habitat Enhancement and Restoration – Tidal Wetlands

- Improve tidal circulation in Paradise Marsh and Sweetwater Marsh to reduce sediment accumulation and enhance habitat quality
- Restore tidal wetlands adjacent to least tern and snowy plover nesting areas to increase foraging opportunities for nesting birds
- Create sustainable access routes for foraging plover adults and chicks from nesting areas to adjacent tidal areas
- Restore intertidal habitat to the northern end of the F&G Street Marsh
- Implement actions that would favor seedling recruitment of salt marsh bird's beak and other native high marsh plant species

##### Habitat Enhancement and Restoration – Native Upland Habitat

- Restore native coastal sage scrub and maritime succulent scrub habitat on Gunpowder Point

##### Nest Site Management

- Enhance/maintain 33 acres of nesting habitat within the Sweetwater Marsh Unit to support least tern and snowy plover nesting
- Conduct annual least tern and snowy plover monitoring on the D Street Fill during the nesting season
- Implement a predator management plan to reduce the loss of endangered species to mammalian and avian predation
- Implement actions that would minimize incidents of trespass in nesting areas and adjacent foraging areas

#### Alternative D – South San Diego Bay Unit

##### Habitat Restoration – Tidal Wetlands

- Restore tidal circulation to ~650 acres of solar salt ponds to achieve a combination of low, mid, and high salt marsh habitat
- Manage the water and salinity levels in an additional 290 acres of unbreached ponds to support migratory and resident birds
- Restore intertidal habitat to portions of the Otay River floodplain to support fish, wildlife, and native salt marsh vegetation

##### Habitat Restoration – Upland and Freshwater Wetlands

- Restore the eastern end of the Otay River floodplain to native coastal sage scrub habitat
- Restore a combination of freshwater marsh and riparian scrub habitat within a reconfigured Otay River channel

##### Nest Site Management

- Maintain the existing levees to support ground nesting birds (e.g., California least tern, colonial nesting seabirds)
- Increase the quality and acreage of available nesting habitat for ground nesting birds within the salt pond complex
- Continue to implement least tern and western snowy plover monitoring and predator management during the nesting season
- Implement actions to minimize incidents of trespass in nesting areas and adjacent foraging areas

##### General Habitat Management

- Initiate a public outreach program to reduce the accumulation of improperly discarded fishing line and other debris in the bay
- Increase the presence of law enforcement on the Refuge, including patrols on the bay, to reduce disturbance to migratory birds
- Control invasive plants within the Otay River floodplain

## Consistency with the California Coastal Management Program

The Service has determined, and the California Coastal Commission (Commission) has concurred, that approval of the San Diego Bay NWR CCP will not adversely affect coastal resources and therefore does not require a consistency determination. Future actions intended to implement the CCP may affect natural resources, however, the extent to which these effects could occur, if at all, cannot be fully evaluated until subsequent detailed step-down planning has been completed. Once this step-down planning has been completed, individual projects or groups of projects will be evaluated for consistency with the California Coastal Management Program.

To ensure that the CCP is implemented over the coming years, such that it remains consistent with the California Coastal Management Program, the Service has committed to provide the Commission's Executive Director with an annual work plan, and to meet with Commission staff to discuss how project implementation and mitigation measures will ensure protection of coastal resources. The Service has also committed to submit additional consistency and/or negative determinations to the Commission for any future CCP projects that hold the potential to adversely affect coastal zone resources. These commitments are included in the Record of Decision.

## Options for Staying In Touch

Here are the best ways for you to stay in touch with what is going on at the San Diego Bay NWR:

- ◆ Periodically check the Refuge website - <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>
- ◆ Have your name added to the distribution list for "Notes from the Refuge" - just contact Victoria Touchstone at the mailing address, e-mail address, or phone numbers provided below.
- ◆ Consider becoming a member of the Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuges  
*The Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuges is a non-profit citizen's organization dedicated to supporting conservation and promoting awareness and appreciation of the National Wildlife Refuges of San Diego County. These include the Tijuana Slough, San Diego, and San Diego Bay NWRs. To obtain more information, visit the Friends website at <http://friendsofsdrefuges.org> or write to the Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuge in care of 301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach, CA 91932.*

## Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about the San Diego Bay NWR. You can contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

### Questions regarding CCP planning can be directed to:

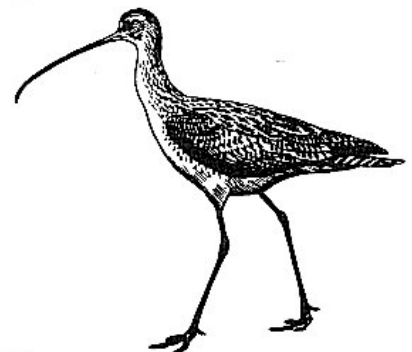
Victoria Touchstone, Refuge Planner  
 San Diego NWR Complex  
 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011  
 760-431-9440 ex. 349 (phone), 760-930-0256 (fax)  
 Email: [Victoria\\_Touchstone@fws.gov](mailto:Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov)

### Questions regarding current Refuge operations can be directed to:

Don Brubaker, Refuge Manager  
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tijuana Slough NWR  
 301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach, CA 91932  
 619-575-2704 (phone), 619-575-6913 (fax)  
 Email: [Don\\_Brubaker@fws.gov](mailto:Don_Brubaker@fws.gov)

## Obtaining a Copy of the Record of Decision

The Record of Decision is available by contacting the Refuge Planner, Victoria Touchstone, at the phone number or e-mail address provided on this page.





**United States Department of the Interior  
Fish & Wildlife Service  
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
6010 Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, CA 92011**

**First Class Mail  
Postage and Fees  
PAID  
US Department  
of the Interior  
Permit G-77**

### **Refuge Purposes**

The San Diego Bay NWR was established to protect, manage, and restore habitats for Federally listed endangered and threatened species and migratory birds and to manage and protect fish and wildlife resources and native plants.

**You can review past *Planning Updates* by visiting our *CCP Webpage*.  
Go to: <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>. You can also find information regarding other  
CCP planning efforts currently underway for Refuges within the San Diego NWR Complex  
by visiting our website.**

**Please pass this *Planning Update* along to anyone you think might be interested in the CCP  
for the San Diego Bay NWR. Thank you!**